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SUBJECT: Media Polling: Most Watch, Distrust State News

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On September 2 the head of the IISEPS polling service provided polling results for a June poll ISEPS conducted on media access in Belarus. The poll found that a minority of Belarusians have access to satellite TV or the internet, and that over 80% watch Belarusian state television news at least weekly. Despite this high rate of viewership, most Belarusians distrust the official news and desire alternate sources of information. Unsurprisingly, age and lack of education correlate highly with state news viewership and support for Lukashenko. Meanwhile, access to satellite TV and the internet seems to play some role in political activism, as measured by membership in parties and NGOs. Overall, some 80% of Belarusians claim to speak Russian as their daily language. End summary.

Media Polling

¶2. (U) Manaev also provided Poloff the results of a June IISEPS poll on Belarusians' media habits. The polling found the following:

Do you have access to the following at home or work?

Satellite television	17.1%
FM radio	61.9
AM or shortwave radio	28.3
Internet	21.0

How often do you watch news on Belarusian state television?

Daily	31.9%
Few times a week	31.3
Once a week	18.0
Once a month	9.1
Never	8.7

How do you rate the accurateness and objectivity of state TV news?

Very accurate	21.5%
Somewhat accurate	38.7
Rarely accurate	21.3
Not accurate	16.3

Is there enough information about the situation in Belarus, or would you prefer alternate sources of information?

Enough	32.4%
Would like more	66.4

13. (SBU) Manaev concludes from the above questions that there is a demand in Belarus for more independent news sources.

14. (U) IISEPS also cross-tabulated its media results with its regular political polling questions to find how Belarusians who have access to different sources of information rate the political scene. These cross tabs found the following:

Are you pleased with how Lukashenko is handling his presidency?

	Satellite	FM	AM/SW	Internet	BT*
Very pleased	6.0%	16.1	11.0	5.9	38.9
Somewhat	34.6	38.8	40.4	30.6	42.7
More displeased	32.6	26.6	31.4	29.2	13.0
Very displeased	26.2	18.2	17.0	34.0	4.8

*BT denotes those who watch state television news daily

Would you vote to re-elect Lukashenko, or is it time to give someone else the chance to do better?

	Satellite	FM	AM/SW	Internet	BT
Re-elect Luka	20.9%	34.6	30.0	17.5	64.5
Someone else	66.6	53.2	56.4	68.6	22.6
Hard to answer	12.1	12.0	13.3	13.5	12.0

If Lukashenko runs for a third term, how will you vote?

	Satellite	FM	AM/SW	Internet	BT
For Lukashenko	11.5%	22.2	17.5	9.2	46.2
Leaning to Lukashenko	12.7	16.9	17.3	12.9	21.1
Leaning to dem Candidate	24.5	14.2	16.4	21.5	7.2
For democratic Candidate	16.5	12.2	14.9	22.0	2.8
For neither	6.0	4.9	6.2	6.9	2.0
Undecided	28.8	29.6	27.7	27.5	20.7

15. (U) Unsurprisingly, the IISEPS poll found that most Belarusians who watch state news daily are over 50 years of age (63.5%), have monthly salaries below USD 110 (69.5%), and are less educated (74% high school or less).

16. (U) A surprising finding is that there is little direct correlation between salary and access to satellite television or the internet. In fact, 74.6% of those with access to satellite television earn between USD 70 to USD 220 a month, while 69.3% of those with internet access fall into the same salary range. The only major difference is more (16.3% vs. 9.9%) people earning less than USD 70/month have internet access compared to satellite TV. This statistic presumably reflects students with access through

their schools. There are no major salary differences between those with access to FM or AM/SW radio.

¶7. (U) Access to independent or external information does appear to affect, at least in a limited manner, political activism:

Do you belong to any political parties or NGOs?

	Satellite	FM	AM/SW	Internet	BT
Party member	3.9%	1.1	1.6	2.5	0.6
NGO member	11.5	8.8	11.8	13.8	6.0
Neither	84.9	90.2	86.2	83.3	93.1

¶8. (U) What language do you use in your everyday life?

	Satellite	FM	AM/SW	Internet	BT
Belarusian	7.5%	10.0	12.9	6.1	16.1
Russian	82.9	85.7	79.6	90.5	72.0
Both	4.7	2.2	3.7	1.9	5.2
A hybrid of both	3.3	1.7	3.1	0.5	6.3

¶9. (SBU) Comment: It is unsurprising, given state media's core demographic and its blatant editorial bias, that those who watch state news daily are much more likely to support Lukashenko. Some of the support for an alternate candidate by those with access to satellite TV and the internet is likely a result of who has access - younger professionals with higher educations. However, as the data on party and NGO membership shows, it is likely that having access to outside sources of information results in greater political activism and personal participation, which in the Belarusian context means greater opposition to Lukashenko.

PHLIPOT